

# **SUMMARY OF 2<sup>ND</sup> SURFACE PASSENGER ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING**

## **Louisiana Statewide Transportation Plan Update**

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### **Meeting Time and Location**

The second Surface Passenger Advisory Council (SPAC) meeting for the *Louisiana Statewide Transportation Plan Update* was held on Tuesday March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2002 from 1:30 to 4:30 PM at the Marriott Hotel in Baton Rouge.

### **Meeting Attendees**

The following persons attended the meeting:

#### **Consultant Team Members**

Jim Amdal, University of New Orleans (Presenter/Facilitator)  
Anne-Marie Rooskens, University of New Orleans  
Butch Babineaux, WSA

#### **Council Members**

Louis K. Bangma, Jr. LARP  
Karen Parsons for Walter Brooks, New Orleans RPC  
Pat Judge, Louisiana Public Transit Association / RTA  
Mike Walters, Greyhound Lines, Inc.

#### **Non-member DOTD Staff**

Carol Cranshaw, Manager Public Transportation Division  
Eric Kalivoda  
Dan Broussard  
Whitney Ledet

#### **Other Attendees**

James Guilbeau, Sierra Club, Delta Chapter  
Joseph DeClouette, Transit Division City of Lake Charles

### **Meeting Purpose and Outline**

The SPAC's meeting purpose was twofold: (1) to update the attendees on the progress the consultants and DOTD have made to date regarding the Surface Passenger Transportation Plan, and (2) to select a permanent chair.

The presentation consisted of three elements: First Butch Babineaux gave a general overview of the project; secondly, Eric Kalivoda addressed the organizational structure of the project, especially the new role of the Intermodal Advisory Council; thirdly, Jim

Amdal presented the current analysis of the existing public transportation system, and addressed strategic issues related to the further development of surface passenger transportation plan.

### **General Overview of the Project**

Butch Babineaux summarized the project features as follows:

- The current plan is an update of the 1996 Statewide Intermodal Transportation Plan
- All transportation modes are being considered in the update
- The plan has 2030 as its horizon year

The update incorporates recent related studies developed since 1996; i.e. the Port Priority Program Data and the Latin America Trade & Transportation Study (LATTS).

The update work plan consists of five major elements. Butch Babineaux reviewed the status of these elements.

- Review Current Plan

The *goals and objectives* (G & Os) of the current plan were reviewed by the Advisory Council during their first meeting. The LA Infrastructure Investment for Economic Prosperity (LIIEP) Commission approved minor changes of the G & Os during their March 4, 2002 meeting. Butch Babineaux distributed these revised goals and objectives as approved. WSA will send the finalized goals and objectives to all the council members for their information and use. All new plan elements will be evaluated based on these goals and objectives.

- A *system analysis* has been conducted for all modes and is currently under review by DOTD. With regards to financing of the proposed infrastructure improvements and related programs and policies, the consultants are looking at the adequacy of existing revenues and possible alternative financing mechanisms.
- The consultants are currently working on a *statewide travel demand model*, which is TransCAD-based and includes both passenger & freight modes to identify capacity deficiencies & demand needs. The model focuses primarily on elements of the national and state highways, but can be expanded for other modes in the future as additional planning funds become available. The model can also be used as a tool for the Quantitative Evaluation of Roadway Projects.
- Both the *airport & rail plans* are under development. The airport plan will include a full inventory of Louisiana's aviation infrastructure plus forecast demand & needs. The rail plan will include line analyses and provide a prioritized program of projects. The importance of freight is recognized in all plans.
- Regarding *public outreach and coordination*, a statewide transportation conference was held in August, 2000. A 2nd conference will be scheduled in the

Fall, 2002. The 1st round of advisory council meetings was held in April, 2001 and a 2nd round is currently being held ( February – April, 2002).

The Louisiana Investment in Infrastructure for Economic Prosperity (LIIIEP) Commission has conducted their first two meetings.

The 1<sup>st</sup> of 3 newsletters was completed in April 2001, and a website is currently being developed and will soon be operational (<http://www.lastateplan.org>). In May-June 2002, the 2<sup>nd</sup> newsletter will be distributed.

### **Organizational Structure of the Project**

The following chairs for the advisory councils have been elected: for aviation – Roy Miller; for freight rail – Carmon Blackmon; for ITS – Tony Tramel; for Ports & Waterways – Sherri McConnell; for the Regional Planning Officials – Ken Perret; for Surface Passenger – Patrick Judge (was elected at the end of this meeting); for trucking – Cathy Gautreaux; for intermodal – Hank Lauricella.

The LIIIEP Commission consists of 13 members, and is chaired by Dr. Movassaghi. The functions of this commission are the following: serve as policy committee for the Plan update; serve as the advocate for funding transportation infrastructure & services critical to economic growth in Louisiana; oversee and guide implementation of the Plan. The Commission will review and comment on the recommendations from the Intermodal Advisory Council. The first meeting of LIIIEP was held February 5, 2002.

In the SITP Update (STP), the Intermodal Advisory Council plays a new role, however the members will remain the same. The Council will receive the recommendations of the different Advisory Councils, and then make a determination of their relative priority between the different modes. The Council then advises the LIIIEP Commission who will make the final decisions.

Karen Parsons pointed out that there doesn't exist an advisory council for non-motorized transportation like pedestrian traffic and bicycles. Butch Babineaux reported that one of the consultants is assigned to address this form of transportation in the plan. Eric Kalivoda added that non-motorized transportation is differently organized in this effort than the other modes, because of the smaller nature of these projects. However, DOTD is focusing on these projects; one planner is specifically assigned to bicycle and pedestrian planning for LDOTD.

Carol Cranshaw announced that she had resigned from the Southern Rapid Rail Transit Commission and from serving as its chairman. It is unknown who will be the new chairman.

### **Current Analysis of the Existing LA Public Transportation System and Strategic Issues Affecting this Mode**

Jim Amdal distinguished three phases regarding the statewide transportation plan update:

- Phase I: Surface Passenger System Existing Condition Report complete Fall 2001.  
Phase II: Model development, future projections, and evaluation currently underway.  
Phase III: Final report with recommendations with program, policy, and project initiatives complete Spring / Summer 2002 with draft report completed by Fall of 2002.

He then addressed the supply side of the Statewide Public Transportation System in LA which exists of three modes: the passenger rail system, the public transit systems (urban and rural), and the motor bus carriers.

***Passenger rail system:***

Current Service: Sunset Limited, City of New Orleans, Crescent

Proposed Service: Crescent Star, Sunset Limited Upgrade (daily service), and Gulf Coast High Speed Rail System.

Jim Amdal then focused on the recently released Amtrak Reform Council recommendations for Amtrak which are the following: (1) a federal oversight agency, (2) a government owned and operated corporation to control the NEC infrastructure (3) a train operating company responsible for the potential privatization of selected train routes currently operated by Amtrak. The ARC further recommended that the federal government provide stable and adequate funding to support the national rail passenger program.

He also gave some figures regarding the future of Amtrak (2002/2003): \$175 million in capital improvements deferred, \$110 million in operating expenses reduced, \$1.2 billion in federal appropriation requested. Amtrak will consider the elimination of unprofitable routes as early as October 1, 2002 if the requested \$1.2 billion is not forthcoming. Recently USDOT IG Kenneth Mead testified that the \$521 million placeholder proposed for Amtrak will make operations impossible.

Karen Parsons pointed up the economic development impacts of cutting Amtrak services in New Orleans. Amtrak provides 400 jobs in New Orleans alone. Eric Kalivoda noted the importance of train service in the state related to tourism. A question was asked if the Surface Passenger Advisory Council should advise the Intermodal Council on this matter.

***Public transit system:***

The public transit system consists of three types of service; urban systems (10), rural systems (22) and specialized systems (104). There is interest in providing transit service to areas which currently do not have public transportation alternatives. The existing analyses concluded that there are 12 parishes in Louisiana that do not have any public transportation, either urban, rural or specialized at this time.

***Motor bus carriers:***

There exist 193 registered motor carriers statewide. There are four fixed route intercity operations: Greyhound Lines Inc., Delta Bus Lines, Inc., Kerville Bus Company Inc., and Flag Enterprises, Inc.

The public transportation main users are in the following categories; poor, minorities, elderly, youth and disabled. 12.5% of the people in the US live below the poverty line, whereas 20.3% of the people in Louisiana live below the poverty line.

***SITP Elements:***

The following SITP elements were reviewed for their status:

- S-2: Prepare a statewide public transportation plan
- S-3: Include urban transit initiatives in statewide transportation planning
- S-4: Establish a surface passenger development fund
- S-5: Establish a safety/inspection program for fixed guideway mass transportation systems

***Other important items discussed:***

- The developments at Amtrak, as earlier noted, put the Northern Louisiana rail developments (Crescent split at Meridian) as proposed in jeopardy.
- DOTD, the FRA and the RPC are going forward with the Almonaster Bridge project. This will include the ROW required for a public transit (LRT) connector across the IHNC.
- Another element which might be looked at is Rapid Bus utilization. Brazil, Washington DC and Pittsburgh were brought up as examples of areas where Rapid Bus is operated. In these cities there are specific lanes dedicated to buses. The idea of Rapid Bus deployment also discussed the impact of the following: transfer points, preemption of traffic signals, utilization of dedicated transit lanes.
- New Orleans commuter rail initiatives should include Slidell to New Orleans, River Parishes to the New Orleans CBD and New Orleans East, and connections to the North Shore. Mayor-elect Nagin has recently stated his plans for the East-West corridor I-310-Airport-CBD-New Orleans to include a NO East component: (Jazzland / I-510). James Guilbeau questioned the ridership potential for light rail from NOIA to CBD.
- Utilize quantitative criteria and methodologies for evaluating the impacts and needs for surface intercity passenger transportation improvements.
- Focus on alternative and additional financing/funding sources required to implement needed surface passenger intercity transportation improvements.

- Conduct an on-going, coordinated and comprehensive multi-modal educational/marketing program for both the legislature and the general public to sell the concept to voters and their elected officials at all levels of government.

***Strategic Issues Affecting Surface Intercity Passenger Transportation:***

- Cooperation / coordination between transportation systems / modes: optimization of passenger transportation systems requires better cooperation between region, state and feds.
- Promote efficient and effective operations.
- Utilize intelligent transportation system applications.
- Investigate potential for new technology deployments.

***New transportation issues after September 11<sup>th</sup>*** (National Center for Intermodal Transportation report excerpts):

- US transportation system security ‘umbrella’ is more porous than American realized,
- US is excessively reliant upon a single mode of commercial passenger service for intercity travel (aviation),
- Intercity commercial passenger transportation connections are poor or non-existent outside a very small number of city pairs,
- Intermodal connectivity is poor or non-existent in many parts of the country,
- The USA is overly dependant on foreign oil.

***Guiding principles in our new future should stress the following:***

- Intermodal connectivity of both commodities and people,
- The intermodal network should offer choices,
- The transportation infrastructure must be planned, designed, and built to maximize intermodal connectivity,
- Cooperation and collaboration among transportation providers and federal agencies.

***Significant Post 9/11 Principles:***

- Recognize that transportation priorities have changed,
- The new priorities place a premium on national and economic security,

- Understand that implementing the transportation agenda will require governmental agencies to reform their structures and operating practices,
- Create a level of redundancy in the transportation system that will cushion the nation against economic shocks and will enable essential passenger and freight movements to occur at all times,
- Integrate all modes,
- Change focus from supply to demand,
- Acknowledge importance of freight transportation,
- Build for the long term.

### **Summary of Meeting Comments**

- Eric Kalivoda pointed out that one of the goals in Vision 2020 is to have a general transit service in every parish by 2015. An assessment done in 1996 showed that 20 urban areas with a population size of 5000-50,000 are without a public transit alternative.
- Joseph DeClouette updated the Council on developments in South-East Louisiana. The City of Lake Charles is currently involved in an ongoing transit study. One of the issues is how to get workers to and from casino's.
- Spatial distribution of employment centers. Before, people came from the suburbs to the core city to go to work. Today, many jobs are located in the suburbs.
- Identify the different distinctions in transit functions: i.e. in the rural areas transit has a social function, whereas in the urban areas it has both a social and congestion relief function. Louis Bangma referred to Arkansas where a non-profit organization provided taxi services, because the city did not provide any alternative to the private automobile.
- Light rail has the interest of all groups and income levels, whereas the bus often is not valued as an alternative by the middle-class population.
- Greyhound has many commuters in buses from Slidell to New Orleans NOUPT. From there, most people walk to their final destination.
- Greyhound cut down on its services from Mandeville and Covington to New Orleans because of low ridership. There still exists private vanpool operations providing this service.
- Eric Kalivoda asked Mike Walters of Greyhound what the State could do for Greyhound to expand their service reach. Mr. Walters pointed out that the utilization of HOV and the accessibility of current HOV lanes (on the Crescent

City Connection) is an important issue, as is the accessibility of \$10 from the NOUPT terminal.

- Carol Cranshaw brought up the issue of safety and security before and after September 11<sup>th</sup>. Before, the State had criteria for bus safety. After September 11<sup>th</sup>, the feds strengthened their guidelines. A CTAA conference on this issue will be held in May 2002.
- A Tangipahoa demonstration project was discussed as an example of a state department contracting with a private provider, and the difficulties of the project. Carol Cranshaw made the point that the state always should consider the public transit system as a first option. Another example is the Job Access Program which consists of a transportation component, and is executed by the department of Social Affairs. Since the federal programs change overtime, the contracts change and providers are constantly changing as well. Fortunately, DOTD is more often involved in the public transit part of federal programs. They advise that in a competitive process, the first choice needs to be the public transit provider which is already in the area.
- James Guilbeau talked about public transit as an important mode for evacuation for the transit dependent population. Pat Judge replied that it is an almost impossible task to evacuate the transit dependent for two reasons: (1) the RTA needs to triple its fleet and (2) it is very hard to find drivers, since they would like to get out of the area with their families ASAP.

### **Election of Chairman and Closure**

Patrick Judge was unanimously elected as chairman of the Surface Passenger Advisory Council, and he closed the Advisory Council Meeting with the following points:

- The Surface Passenger Transportation Plan should be as statewide in scope as possible.
- The link between pedestrian, bicycle and public transportation should be recognized and included in the plan.
- TEA-21 will be re-authorized in 1.5 years. The next 6 months will be crucial for the contents of this re-authorization. The council needs to address the issues regarding the TEA-21 update. TEA-21 expires on September 30, 2003.
- The Council supports better connectivity between private operators such as Greyhound and public transit.
- Federal Transportation Trust Fund 'firewalls' expire September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2002. All transportation professionals need to get prepared for the transportation funding debate.